

Information/Action Item

Student Impact Committee

Update on the Dream Act

For the first time in California history, under the California Dream Act of 2011, authored by former Assembly Member Gil Cedillo, students who meet AB 540 criteria are eligible to receive Cal Grants.

We received over 20,000 timely California Dream Applications. We processed the Dream Applications through the regular Grant Delivery System because determining eligibility for Cal Grants is the same for a FAFSA and a Dream Application. Dream Act students must meet the same graduation, academic grade point average, and financial need requirements as any other Cal Grant student. In addition, Dream Act students must also have attended high school in California for at least three years. As a result, we have made over 4,000 High School Entitlement (E1) Cal Grant award offers so far.

Now that the E1 Cal Grant awards cycle for Dream Act applicants is winding down, we are preparing for the next Cal Grant award cycles that occur in early May. The Transfer Entitlement (E2) program specifically targets community college students who intend to transfer during the 2013-14 year to an eligible institution offering a baccalaureate degree. In addition, the Cal Grant C program annually funds awards for students who are pursuing vocational or occupational certificate programs. We are estimating that the award offers to Dream Act applicants under these two Cal Grant programs, combined with the 4,000 E1 award offers, will bring us close to our initial Dream Act award projections of about 6,000 award offers.

In our first year as the Dream Act Application processor, we have surmounted obstacles and have learned many valuable lessons. Creating a financial aid application that could produce an expected family contribution (EFC) while minimizing the level of difficulty for users and transferring the student data to the institutions in a 12-month window was difficult. During that timeframe, we grew in knowledge about the FAFSA application process, federal financial aid programs, AB 540 criteria, Deferred Action for Childhood arrivals (DACA) and many others outside realm of the Cal Grant program. In that effort, we received tremendous support, feedback and recommendations from the financial aid community, segmental representatives, advocacy groups and most importantly, the students. Without their collaboration, the California Dream application would have been even more difficult.

However, even as we are making Cal Grant award offers, we have become aware of new issues that require resolution before the 2013-14 fall term begins. There is still confusion about the DACA and the California Dream Act, as evidenced by numerous students who completed both a FAFSA and California Dream Application. Some of

these students have called us and identified themselves in a DACA status while receiving a Cal Grant award through the FAFSA application. We will consult more with federal agencies, and work with our collaborators to increase and improve communication to provide more clarity to the Dream Applicants.

We are also addressing the issue related to Cal Grant Access award disbursements for the eligible AB540 students that do not have social security numbers (SSNs). Many, but not all, higher education institutions require SSNs to process a student's payment through certain banking institutions that issue either a check or a debit card. We are currently working with segmental representatives to identify the institutions whose systems require social security numbers, and exploring options to deliver the Cal Grant payments to affected students. One potential option might allow for the Commission to pay access awards directly to Dream Act students.

Despite some of the challenges we faced in the development of the application, we continue to make enhancements to the 2013-14 online application, provide webinar trainings, assist students to successfully complete the application and are planning the development of the 2014-15 application. We have also started a Dream Act Application User Manual for Financial Aid Administrators that will be available this summer.

Although the filing deadline for academic year 2013-14 has passed, students may still submit their California Dream Application for institutional aid. Institutional aid takes on particular significance for Dream Act students. Even with a Cal Grant, which covers only a portion of a student's cost of attendance at a college or university, a Dream Act student may not be able to attend since he or she would not be eligible for federal financial aid, including federal loans. We will be keeping a close eye on how many of the Cal Grants awarded to Dream Act students we ultimately pay.

At the direction of the Student Impact Committee, we have invited the segmental representatives to participate in the Committee's and the Commission's April 25 meetings to share their experiences under the Dream Act. The Dream Act authorized the segments to award institutional aid to Dream Act students as of January 2013.

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